

# Mastering the Arithmetic of Arms Control

The order in which weapons are dismantled will play a large role in easing—or maintaining—the tensions that hinder arms control. Cutting counterforce ICBMs first would facilitate further reductions.

By Albert Gore Jr.

President Reagan's speech at Eureka College Sunday instantly changed the nature of America's debate over strategic weapons and arms control. Whether one agrees with his proposal or not, the fact must be recognized that he has now called for a resumption of talks with the Soviets and that he has laid down this country's official negotiating position. As a result, advocates of competing plans and approaches have a different role to play.

The proposal itself raises many questions. It is a call for U.S. and Soviet forces to look rather like mirror-image twins, a resemblance that would be achieved by carving away at the many differences which presently distinguish one side from the other.

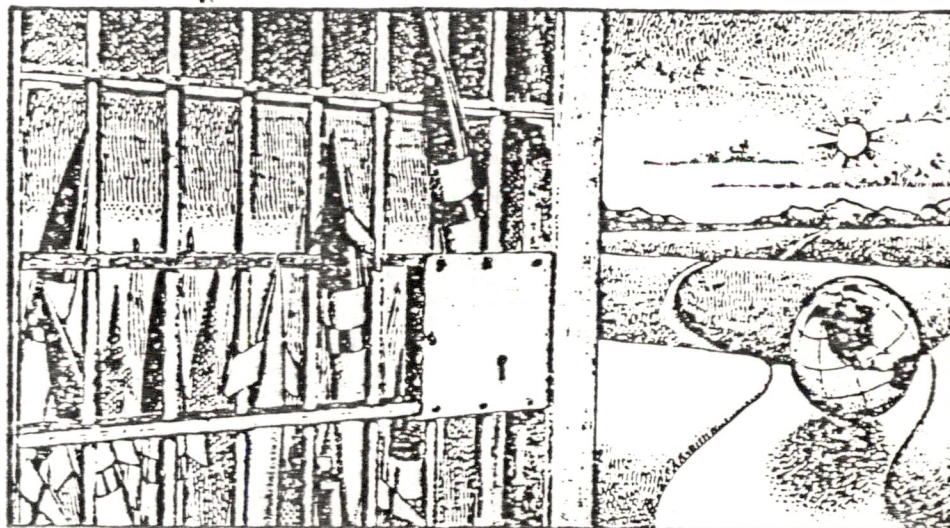
In the first phase, the President wants sharp reductions to a point where both sides would have equal numbers of warheads on an equal number of ballistic missiles (counting both the ground and sea-launched varieties), with no more than half of those warheads to be based on land.

In the second phase, the President wants each side to have equal throw-weight, at a figure lower than that for current U.S. forces. (Throw-weight is a measure of how big a payload of weapons missiles can loft from the United States to targets in the Soviet Union and vice versa.)

According to the President, these reductions would be made to achieve "stability through significant reductions in the most destabilizing nuclear systems: ballistic missiles and especially intercontinental ballistic missiles."

This statement is in line with a growing consensus among students of the nuclear weapons problem in this country that the arms-control process must be targeted on the so-called "ICBM vulnerability" problem—a tangle of issues and fears that is forcing both sides to deploy ever greater numbers of weapons in a search for safety.

Right now, this is a problem that affects us rather than the Soviets. The scenario that the President currently fears



Newsday Illustration: Ned Lerner

ty of these weapons that we are to deploy, they would exist in numbers great enough to carry out, in theory, a U.S. first strike against Soviet forces. So, as a side effect of our effort to close our window of vulnerability, we would be opening a window of vulnerability on the Soviets. Moreover, the Soviet window would be proportionately more serious for them. Our nuclear forces are relatively well spread among land-, air- and sea-based launchers, while the Soviets have concentrated almost 80 percent of their nuclear warheads on land-based ballistic missiles.

But it is clearly not in our interest to open a Soviet window of vulnerability if our objective in all this is to reduce the chances of nuclear war. Unless we and the Soviets change from the path down which we are heading, we will create a situation in which each side will have so much to lose if it hesitates to act during a crisis that both sides will be forced to keep their nuclear forces on a hair-trigger alert, ready to be launched at the first hint of an imminent attack from the other side. And in a political crisis, fear may prompt a disastrous miscalculation. Once launched, ICBMs cannot be recalled.

As I said, the President's proposal begins with these

facts in mind, and purposes to deal with them. However, the problem is that not all reductions are benign, and not all forms of equality lead to stability.

Stability is not something inherent in the strategic forces of either country, taken by themselves. It depends instead on the relationship between the two forces and on how these forces tend to influence decision-making when they are played off against each other.

To assess the President's program, in other words, it is essential to know precisely how the forces of each side would look as they went through the two phases of his proposal. There are many paths that either side could take—and the President has understandably not spelled them out in his opening position. It is quite possible to realign the forces of both countries in a way that fits his outline, but that leads not to more but to less stability than before. Both sides could be mirror images of each other, and both could exist in much smaller numbers. Yet, each side might, depending on the weapons it chose to keep, still be in a position to launch a first strike against the other's ICBMs while retaining substantial force in reserve. In the aftermath, the attacker would enjoy a substantial numerical advantage over the victim.

In other words, the President's formula can be worked out in a way that leads to the worst of all possible arrangements: mutually vulnerable forces for both countries, poised always on a hair-trigger alert. Rough calculations I have done based on existing and upcoming U.S. and Soviet weapons show me that this could indeed occur, and that it should be considered one of the more likely outcomes.

This is obviously an undesirable result and, presumably, one that the United States and the Soviet Union will try to avoid as both nations look for agreement. It can certainly be avoided if both nations wish to avoid it.

The key to a successful agreement must be the elimination of even the theoretical possibility of a strategic first strike by either side. It does no good to offset a Soviet capability of this sort with one of our own. The fear of a first strike by one country must be removed, for it is a poison to the relationship between the countries. A mutual fear of a first strike by either is an ever more potent poison.

In an effort to find a way to structure an agreement that would eliminate the first-strike problem for both sides, I proposed in March a set of detailed guidelines for a strategic agreement—a proposal that had counterforce weapons as its focus. Like the President's, this proposal has two phases.

The first phase would be a selective freeze on any additions to the counterforce inventory of either side and on any improvements to counterforce weapons currently deployed. This might also be described as a "negotiators' pause," designed to give breathing room to the negotiators by slowing the momentum of technical development at the cutting edge of the arms race.

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is that the Soviets could use their advantages in size and number of ICBM missiles and warheads to destroy our ICBM silos and our bomber bases, and that it would take only a fraction of the Soviet Union's ICBM force to do so. Were this to occur, the President would have a difficult choice to make. He could not retaliate against the Soviet cities that the Soviet weapons held in reserve would be aimed upon. American cities, thus killing scores of millions of people—people who might be saved if the President decided to come to terms with the Soviets instead.

Many serious analysts reject this scenario. They deny that a first strike against U.S. silos—referred to as a counterforce attack—against the forces of the United States, as opposed to civilian targets, would ever look attractive to any sane Soviet leader. But their arguments about the logic of a first strike by the Soviets have been unable to dispel the fear of one. The reason for this is that calculations show that such a strike is now at least mathematically possible for the Soviets.

Our planners have responded to this problem by concluding that the President ought to have another option at his disposal—that of firing counterforce missiles of our own at the Soviet missiles held in reserve after their first strike, then he would at least have an alternative to retaliation or surrender.

As a result, we now have two weapons systems under development that are designed to give the President a "third option." They are the MX missile, which is currently in production, and the Ground-based Interceptor, which it could render a Soviet attack, and the Trident II or D-5 missile, to be placed aboard the new Ohio-class submarines. Neither of these weapons is to be deployed until the end of the decade, and until they are, we are said to have a "window of vulnerability"—vulnerability, that is, to intimidation, because we are theoretically open to the blackmail which might follow a first strike.

Because of their great accuracy, these new weapons are by nature counterforce weapons—capable of destroying Soviet ICBMs in their silos. And because of the quanti-

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